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2005



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Jadis DA88 Signature

The French have a knack when it comes to romance. And they look stylish, too!

PRICE: £6,999 CONTACT: Absolute Sounds, 58 Durham Road, London SW20 0DC ☎ 020 8371 3909 @ www.jadis-electronics.com

The Jadis DA88 Signature. It's an integrated valve amp costing a healthy seven grand, but if you have the cash and appreciate being seduced when you listen to music, it's also your next purchase.

Clichés like 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder' abound, but this thing really is a *beaut*. The polished finish with heavy, hand-made transformers sets this amp apart from all others, and even though it sports seemingly retro devices like toggle switches and should be used with a valve cage, it still manages to look more like some *objet d'art* instead of a slab of audio electronics.

The back features the homespun transformers Jadis is so rightly famous for. There are three: a large power transformer on the left and two output transformers centre and right. This accounts for much of the back-breakingly heavy 40kg mass. It also accounts for the extremely wide bandwidth for a valve design, with the amp claimed to be capable of delivering sound from 10Hz-29kHz.

Essentially, the DA88 Signature is a power amp with a passive preamp built in. Even so, the tube complement is quite vast. It uses five double triode tubes (three ECC82 and two ECC83) in the input and regulation stages, plus two pairs of KT88s per side for the output stage. Thirteen valves is not an unlucky number, though, at least as far as the sound quality goes. With eight KT88s in push-pull mode, the amp delivers 60 watts in Class A for speakers with from one to 16-ohm impedances. This is measured at two per cent distortion, but this is common with valve amps and the distortion is usually benign odd harmonic distortion instead of the abrasive-sounding first and third harmonics.

The manual is an important read, because a set of jumpers are used on the transformers to connect the right output taps to match the impedance of the speakers used. Strangely, however, it describes the settings for two-to-eight-ohm speakers and for speakers up to eight ohms (the identical images confirm the tautology). Fortunately, this is the right setting for most speakers, but if your chosen transducers have an impedance outside of this range, you should contact Jadis to find the correct jumper positions. The manual also explains that the amp inverts absolute phase, so put the red wire where the black should go and vice versa.

The price puts this amplifier very much into two-box pre/power territory, with really high-class combinations from valve and solid-state manufacturers (including a couple

from Jadis itself) as distinct competition. In fact, the Jadis is almost in a class of its own in terms of integrated amplification. But, if you fall under its spell, the need for two boxes simply falls away.

SOUND QUALITY

The Jadis name is built on fantasy. You listen to Jadis, you live the fantasy. And the DA88 is the best exponent of that fantasy world you can imagine. You can play absolutely anything through it and it sounds completely fantastic. Rose tinted? You betcha. Warm and sugar-coated? Absolutely. And you'll love it for that. Of all the amps on the market, this is the only one where you could line up the absolute worst discs you (or your friends) have and still get a sound that brings out the best in the disc. Never mind the primo recordings, or the audiophile pressings, this is the amp that makes even compilation discs sound fine. It's truly uncanny.

So, what is it about the performance that makes the Jadis DA88 so damn special? Well, the sound is so harmonically rich, it brings out the musician and the dancer in all of us. There is no passive interaction with music – this amp gets past the normal hi-fi perspectives and simply plays music with passion.

“The sound is so harmonically rich, it brings out the musician and dancer in all of us.”

Don't expect strict neutrality, however – it doesn't do that at all. Instead, you begin to question whether neutrality is really that important after all. That legendary 'cuckoo clock' speech about the Swiss from *The Third Man* springs to mind. Who needs accuracy, it's so boring! In most cases, this would be audiophile heresy, but not when a Jadis is in the dock.

Coming from the country that ended the divine right of kings in such a dramatic manner, the DA88 Signature sums up baroque majesty, in sound as well as looks. The soundstage isn't just large and open-sounding, it's positively seductive. It doesn't just turn your home into a concert hall; close your eyes and it transforms the room into a Renaissance chapel, complete with frescos by Michelangelo.

It's also got this passionate articulation going on, that turns even the most base crooner into Sam Cooke and Al Green all rolled into one. It's deeply un-PC to discuss

such things today, but back in the 1950s and 1960s, hi-fi as status symbol briefly became as seductive as serving cocktails. If we mine this politically incorrect seam a bit, this must be the ultimate make-out amp: it looks rich and fabulous, sounds delicious and gets you hot and sweaty. In other words, buy this amplifier and get laid more. Yes, it's that good (and that kind of) an amplifier – you don't own it, you have a love affair with it.

Okay, back to Planet Hi-Fi. This is a deeply insightful amp on a musical level, even if it doesn't aim for neutrality. You get the sense of musical occasion, of the passion behind the music. It's extremely detailed, beautifully articulate and comes with a deceptively deep, powerful bass and the most sumptuous, clean and extended treble this side of reality.

But it's the midband that really marks out the DA88 Signature for greatness – it's so open and natural-sounding that you wonder what you were doing with all that lesser hi-fi in the past. Female voice is a particularly tough call for the midband of even the best amps yet it's with female vocals that the DA88 Signature makes its strongest case. Play KT Tunstall through this in demonstration and you'll have to either buy the amp or burn the disc. Here, her voice takes on nuances entirely missing on

other amps and suddenly the lyrics become all the more poignant. Even decade-old complaint rock from Alanis Morissette becomes all the more impassioned and even more angry, yet takes on a fragile beauty that almost makes *Jagged Little Pill* acceptable to males.

One could ask whether these nuances are a function of the disc or the amplifier, but not if you have listened to the DA88 Signature. Its brainwashing is instant and instantly successful – the answer to this 'recording or playback' question is 'who cares?'

It seems valve amplifiers are the finest expressions of the national hi-fi zeitgeist you can muster. Italian valve amps look beautiful and sound rich. American amps are big and sound it. British valve amps are either elegantly understated or have that kitchen table 'chic'. And the French have that self-assured romantic charm. Right now, the French are winning the valve war, and the Jadis DA88 Signature is their weapon of mass delight. **HFC**

Alan Sircom